

# **Grand Strategy**

Contending Contemporary Analyst Views and Implications for the  
U.S. Navy

Elbridge Colby

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# Table of Contents

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Table of Contents.....	i
Executive summary .....	1
A grand strategy of hegemony .....	1
A grand strategy of selective engagement.....	2
A grand strategy of offshore balancing .....	2
A grand strategy of integrating U.S. strategy into international collective efforts.....	3
Isolationism and world government .....	3
Conclusion .....	3
Introduction .....	5
Purpose .....	5
Methodology.....	6
The importance of grand strategy .....	8
The landscape of the debate.....	9
Four candidate grand strategies.....	11
A grand strategy of hegemony .....	11
A grand strategy of selective engagement.....	20
A grand strategy of offshore balancing .....	26
A grand strategy of integration of U.S. strategy into international collective efforts .....	31
Dark horse candidates: Isolationism and world government.....	38
Conclusions .....	41
Utility of strategy and strategic debate .....	41
Role of the Navy.....	41



# Executive summary

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A “grand strategy” is an overarching plan to employ all elements of national power to advance and fulfill a state’s security-related objectives in the foreign sphere. At its core, a grand strategy outlines the objectives a state seeks, and provides guidance on how the state will achieve them. In early 2011, the Chief of Naval Operations’ Strategic and Planning Division (OPNAV N51) requested that CNA review the ongoing academic debate pertaining to possible evolutions in US grand strategy.

Discussions on this issue have taken on renewed salience in recent years, in light of the rapidly changing strategic environment.<sup>1</sup> Proposals for the most appropriate American grand strategy fall into four categories: hegemony, selective engagement, offshore balancing, and integration of American strategy into collective efforts. These categories differ markedly in their implications for the country, the U.S. armed forces, and the U.S. Navy. Two other categories—isolationism (an oft-mentioned contender in political debate), and world government—both provide intellectually coherent approaches to a grand strategy but are not serious candidates in the current discourse.

## A grand strategy of hegemony

Proponents of a grand strategy of pursuing hegemony argue that the international system can be stable and American interests effectively safeguarded only if the United States seeks to attain and maintain hegemony—that is, if it has the ability and willingness to dominate other states and thus dictate the “rules of the road” of the international system. The military requirements of this strategy are extremely demanding, as it means that the United States must be able to defeat and impose its will on any individual or combination of states in any contingency. Critics of the strategy contend that it is unnecessarily ambitious and will either cause or accelerate America’s decline. The strategy would place significant demands upon the Navy and would logically require substantial funding for

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<sup>1</sup> For a report on one such recent discussion, see Michael Gerson and Alison Lawler Russell, American Grand Strategy and Seapower, CNA Research Memorandum D0025988.A2/Final, Nov 2011.

maritime forces; it would, however, also require very strong ground and air forces and thus would not necessarily privilege naval priorities.

## **A grand strategy of selective engagement**

Advocates of a grand strategy of selective engagement contend that the United States should maintain a strong military position in regions of vital interest to Washington designed to ensure stability there on favorable terms to the United States, but should eschew the goal of hegemony. The military requirements for the grand strategy of selective engagement would be very substantial, though less so than those for a strategy of hegemony: U.S. forces in East Asia, Europe, and the Persian Gulf would need to be able to help defend threatened allies and deter and defeat aggression by adversaries or rivals. The Navy would see a continuation of its existing very substantial obligations to command the oceans and to provide assured access to and protection for the key regions of U.S. interest. Critics of the strategy attack it from two sides: advocates of hegemony argue that it would be insufficient to secure stability and American interests, while advocates of more restrained strategies contend that it would embroil the United States in unnecessary and draining conflicts.

## **A grand strategy of offshore balancing**

Defenders of a grand strategy of offshore balancing argue for a more aloof approach that would involve a substantial withdrawal of the U.S. military presence from Asia, the Persian Gulf, and Europe, and the reintroduction of those forces only if one of these key regions appeared to be in danger of falling under the sway of a regional hegemon. Proponents of this grand strategy emphasize that the United States would save much in terms of lives, resources, and political capital through a more detached posture, but would nonetheless retain a substantial military capability to intervene again if circumstances warranted it. The strategy would require the United States to retain a military capability unilaterally to sustain operations at long distances from bases in the United States, in order to hold or wrest territory from an adversary. This would mean that the Navy would play a central role. Because of the need to be able to re-enter key regions forcibly even in the face of a powerful regional hegemon, ground and air forces would also need to be especially powerful in order to compensate for the advantages foresworn by waiting until a regional hegemon arose and upset the local balance. This would likely mean that investment and resource allocations would remain balanced among the services. Critics allege that the strategy would lead to instability and conflict, which in turn would threaten important American interests, and would therefore actually impose a greater rather than a lesser military obligation on the United States.

# A grand strategy of integrating U.S. strategy into international collective efforts

Supporters of integrating U.S. strategy into international collective efforts take a fundamentally different approach. They argue that traditional geopolitical concerns are being transcended, that the likelihood of serious interstate conflict is declining, and that the serious challenges facing the United States in the future are novel and transnational in character. Consequently, proponents argue that the United States should not focus on traditional power considerations but rather pool its power with that of other like-minded nations to address these global challenges. The main military implication of the strategy is the transition from the U.S. military as an instrument of primarily U.S. interest, to the U.S. military as a participant in a broader consortium of states. In light of the shift in threat perceptions, military requirements would generally shift from higher-end to lower-end platforms, approaches, and postures. Critics of this strategy argue that it unwisely discounts the possibility of major war, thereby leaving the United States vulnerable, while ensnaring it in multiple conflicts peripheral to its core interests.

## Isolationism and world government

Isolationism is often raised, generally unfavorably, as a candidate grand strategy for the United States. World government is a logical possibility but has few, if any, serious adherents in today's debate. There is very little policy-relevant support for either as a grand strategy for the United States.

## Conclusion

While it is not the prerogative of the Navy to select among these grand strategies for the Nation, the Navy leadership must be prepared to provide those decision-makers who do have that prerogative with well-grounded advice on the implications of the various approaches for the Nation, for the Navy, and for the Navy's role in defending the Nation and its interests. Only by first understanding and analyzing the respective arguments can the Navy leadership develop the appropriate recommendations for the national leadership.

In thinking through the implications of each, Navy leaders should ask two sets of questions:

- First, is major war essentially a thing of the past, at least for as long as we can envision? If this is the case, the **grand strategy of integration** offers much, while



the other three options focus too much on archaic concerns—a focus that may undermine stability.

- Second, if major war remains possible, what is the best way to sustain a peaceful international environment conducive to American interests? Is the international environment highly anarchic and likely to fall apart into chaos without expansive U.S. involvement, thus calling forth an ambitious strategy of **hegemony**? From this perspective, the exertions required to sustain hegemony are worth the cost because they are less than what the United States would suffer in more restrained strategies. For **selective engagement** and **offshore balancing**, however, a strategy of hegemony is both unnecessary and harmful, likely to undermine American strength and long-term commitment to upholding stability by embroiling it in unnecessary conflicts. **Selective engagement** straddles the divide between strategies of hegemony and offshore balancing. It points to the dangerous anarchy that would be possible, and perhaps even likely, following American withdrawal to an offshore balancing position but calls for a more disciplined focus on the regions and problems that most affect core U.S. interests. **Offshore balancing** focuses on husbanding American power, assessing that threats can be countered once they arise.

There is no “right” answer to these debates, which turn on assessments of human behavior that are inherently unpredictable. Nonetheless, each involves tradeoffs and assessments of future opportunities and risks, which the American people and their leaders should understand.

# Introduction

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## Purpose

What should the grand strategy of the United States be? The Navy's Strategy and Planning Division (OPNAV N51) asked CNA to review the state of the policy and academic debate on this issue to inform the Navy's input into national decision-making and specifically to inform the incoming Chief of Naval Operations. CNA has surveyed and assessed the discourse in key think tanks and the academy on this question. This is important because dramatic developments such as the financial crisis and economic downturn that began in 2008, the continued rapid rise and growth of China, and the unrest in the Middle East have substantially changed the global situation that *A Cooperative Strategy for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Seapower* addressed when it was released in October 2007. These dynamics have persuaded many that a reassessment of American national strategy is needed, and some have concluded that a course change is in order. Indeed, in his outgoing speech in May 2011 Secretary of Defense Robert Gates called for a sober and serious assessment of just what kind of role America, and America's military, should play in the future.<sup>2</sup>

This document seeks to lay out the state of that debate and advise Navy decision-makers and staffs on how best to understand and take advantage of that debate.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Speech of Secretary of Defense Robert M. Gates to the American Enterprise Institute, May 24, 2011, available at [www.defense.gov/speeches/speech.aspx?speechid=1570](http://www.defense.gov/speeches/speech.aspx?speechid=1570).

<sup>3</sup> This document is one of a series requested by the Navy. Related documents in the series include two forthcoming papers: Stanley B. Weeks, (title forthcoming), CNA (date forthcoming) and Philip Bozzelli, (title forthcoming), CNA (date forthcoming). Robert Rubel conducted a similar review in 2006 during a substantially different strategic environment in preparation for the Navy's New Maritime Strategy of 2007, *A Cooperative Strategy for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Seapower*. For an overview of this review, see Robert C. Rubel, "The New Maritime Strategy: The Rest of the Story," *Naval War College Review*, Spring 2008: 69-78.

# Methodology

As a literature review of the debate on the proper grand strategy for the United States, this project began by consulting previous reviews and discussing with subject matter experts the key starting points in the literature. This initial exploration provided a conceptual framework for our subsequent investigation, which was based on reviews of well-known books and articles on the question, citations within these works, references from subject matter experts, ideas from attendance at relevant conferences, and other sources.

Based on this examination, and drawing on key earlier literature reviews, we selected four categories of viewpoints, based on their prominence in the policy and academic debate about U.S. grand strategy. We then subjected these categories to a series of questions that we felt would best elicit the key themes of each and would draw out the principal implications for the United States, the U.S. military, and the U.S. Navy.

Finally, we submitted our draft for review within CNA, and incorporated the resulting suggestions for methodological and substantive improvements.

What is a “grand strategy”?

A grand strategy may be defined as a nation’s conscious effort to employ all elements of national power to advance and fulfill its security-related objectives in the foreign sphere.<sup>4</sup> At its core, a grand strategy outlines the objectives that a state seeks to attain and provides guidance on how the state will achieve them. A properly crafted grand strategy therefore provides top-level guidance on how to connect “ends” and “means.”

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<sup>4</sup> For discussions of the meaning of strategy and grand strategy, see, e.g., Edward Luttwak, *Strategy: The Logic of War and Peace* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987), especially appendix 1 and chapter 12; Barry Posen, “A Grand Strategy of Restraint,” in *Finding Our Way: Debating American Grand Strategy*, S. Brimley and M. Flournoy, eds. (Washington, D.C.: Center for New American Security, 2008), 84; Paul Kennedy, ed., *Grand Strategies in War and Peace* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992); Charles Hill, *Grand Strategies: Literature, Statecraft, and World Order* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011); Beatrice Heuser, *The Evolution of Strategy: Thinking War from Antiquity to the Present* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); and Williamson Murray, Richard Hart Sinnreich, and James Lacey, eds., *The Shaping of Grand Strategy: Policy, Diplomacy, and War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

Substantively, a grand strategy is broader than a military strategy, which is a plan for exploiting one's military capabilities in a given situation to advance an overall objective.<sup>5</sup> But a grand strategy is also narrower than a foreign policy, which encompasses all of a state's interactions beyond its borders. A grand strategy pertains specifically to the political-military aspects of a state's interests—those touching on its security and the security and vitality of its important interests.<sup>6</sup>

A grand strategy is also, ultimately, a plan or a schema for advancing defined goals. It is not purely an expression of aspirations but must actually provide a concrete way forward to exploit opportunities in an unpredictable and contingent environment.<sup>7</sup> A grand strategy must therefore provide a coherent and illuminating logic for decision-makers to use in determining what to do—and what not to do—and how to do it.

## Seven core questions

In particular, a grand strategy must provide useful, workable answers to a set of six core questions:

- What are the objectives and purposes of the United States in its relations with the rest of the world?
- What is the nature of the international system and how can it be expected to affect the United States?
- In light of the nature of the international system, what does the United States need to do in order to fulfill its objectives and purposes? What are the threats to the United States and its interests?
- What are the military implications of the strategy?

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<sup>5</sup> The Department of Defense defines “strategy” as: “A prudent idea or set of ideas for employing the instruments of national power in a synchronized and integrated fashion to achieve theater, national, and/or multinational objectives.” United States Department of Defense, *Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms*, January 2011, 350.

<sup>6</sup> See, for instance, Robert J. Art, *A Grand Strategy for America* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003), 1-2.

<sup>7</sup> See, on this point, Andrew Krepinevich and Barry Watts, *Regaining Strategic Competence* (Washington, D.C.: Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, 2009). Andrew Marshall, the director of the Defense Department Office of Net Assessments, has long been an important proponent of this argument.

- Why is a given grand strategy superior to its possible alternatives?
- What are the critiques of the strategy?

To be useful to the U.S. Navy, a seventh question must be answered:

- What are the implications of this strategy for the U.S. Navy?

## The importance of grand strategy

A grand strategy, properly formulated and implemented, can lend a coherence and logic to a nation's otherwise ad hoc and reactive foreign policies.<sup>8</sup> Especially in the context of scarce resources and capabilities, grand strategies can lead to a more efficient use of a state's assets. In light of the fiscal challenges the United States will face in the coming decades, this attraction will be especially powerful. Moreover, a grand strategy can help coordinate large and diverse bureaucracies, as well as communicate a government's policy objectives and plans both to its own citizens and to other states, including both allies and adversaries.<sup>9</sup>

Some, however, question the utility or propriety of a grand strategy, especially for the United States; they view such a strategy as a distraction, as undemocratic, or as un-American.<sup>10</sup> Others are skeptical of the ability of the United States to formulate and carry out a coherent grand strategy. They argue that, given the range of U.S. interests around the world and the number of domestic actors that exert considerable influence on foreign policy, the United States cannot make the tough choices that a real grand strategy requires.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> See, for instance, Henry A. Kissinger, *Does America Need a Foreign Policy? Toward a Diplomacy for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2001).

<sup>9</sup> See, e.g., Posen, "A Grand Strategy of Restraint," 84. For some of the difficulties involved in corralling bureaucracies, see, e.g., James Q. Wilson, *Bureaucracy: What Government Agencies do and why they do it*. (New York: Basic Books, 1989).

<sup>10</sup> For an analysis of the critiques of strategy, grand and otherwise, see Richard K. Betts, "Is Strategy an Illusion?" *International Security* 25, no. 2, Autumn 2000: 5-50.

<sup>11</sup> For some ruminations along these lines, and for examination of the role of domestic politics in U.S. grand strategy, see Walter A. McDougall, "Can the United States Do Grand Strategy?" in FPRI-Temple University Consortium on Grand Strategy, *The Telegram* no. 3, April 2010; Peter Trubowitz, *Defining the National Interest: Conflict and Change in American Foreign Policy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998); Richard N. Rosecrance and Arthur A. Stein, eds., *The Domestic*

Despite these disagreements, debate continues about an appropriate grand strategy for the United States, suggesting that the adoption and implementation of a grand strategy is desirable for at least a significant segment of government policy-makers and influential outside analysts.<sup>12</sup> In light of this, understanding the debate is important.

## The landscape of the debate

Proposals for a U.S. grand strategy tend to cluster around four main pillars:<sup>13</sup>

- Hegemony
- Selective engagement
- Offshore balancing
- Integration of American strategy into collective efforts.

Each of these grand strategies answers the key questions outlined above differently. Inevitably, such categorizations are reductive and imperfect. They have substantial commonalities and, indeed, analysts often draw upon elements of more than one in their analyses and recommendations. Yet there is utility in such definitions, for while each approach shares some important commonalities, none answers all of them the same way—and each answers at least one of them differently. Moreover, each viewpoint is held in whole or in part by some influential segments of policy-makers and influencers, each calls upon deep reservoirs in the American tradition, and each can point to plausible theoretical and historical arguments to buttress its claims to analytical and prescriptive superiority.

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*Bases of Grand Strategy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993); and Kevin Narizny, *The Political Economy of Grand Strategy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007).

<sup>12</sup> For an argument along these lines and an assessment of the Obama Administration's grand strategy, see Daniel W. Drezner, "Does Obama Have a Grand Strategy? Why We Need Doctrines in Uncertain Times," *Foreign Affairs*, July/August 2011.

<sup>13</sup> This categorization is derived from two sources: Barry R. Posen and Andrew L. Ross, "Competing Visions for U.S. Grand Strategy," *International Security* 21, no. 3, Winter 1996-1997: 5-53; and Art, *A Grand Strategy for America*. CNA also identified other theoretical possibilities for U.S. grand strategy, namely world government and isolationism, but did not include these in the main analysis for reasons discussed below.

In the following section, we will describe each of the four grand strategies and discuss how each answers the seven core questions outlined above.

# Four candidate grand strategies

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## A grand strategy of hegemony

One school in the debate advocates that the United States pursue hegemony, or at least supremacy, in the international environment. A state may be said to exercise hegemony when it dominates other states, and thus can and does dictate the “rules of the road” of the international system.<sup>14</sup> While hegemony does not require that the hegemon be able to conquer or coerce other powers at will, a state in such a position is able decisively to influence other nations within its orbit by setting the bounds of the permissible, exercising oversight over and vetoing others’ actions and plans, and influencing the flow of economic interaction by exercising control over key levers such as currency.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Hegemony is distinct from primacy or even leadership. Hegemony entails the ability to coerce other states into falling into line. In contrast, primacy is defined by Robert Jervis as “being much more powerful than any other state according to the usual and crude measures of power and the “greater ability than any rival to influence a broad range of issues.” Robert Jervis, “International Primacy: Is the Game Worth the Candle?” *International Security* 17, no. 4, Spring 1993: 52-53. Samuel Huntington agrees with this definition, similarly emphasizing that it entails one government’s having a greater ability to exercise influence than other governments. Samuel P. Huntington, “Why International Primacy Matters,” *International Security* 17, no. 4, Spring 1993: 68. Hegemony is thus the ability to run an international system, while primacy is the relative quality of being ahead of the others in the system.

<sup>15</sup> See, for instance, Robert Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 144-145. Gilpin characterizes hegemony as leadership in an international environment in which the hegemon supplies public goods, such as a secure status quo, free trade, and a stable monetary backbone in exchange for revenue and deference. American hegemony, he explains, has fostered free trade and freedom of capital movements, supplied the key reserve currency, and managed the international monetary system. The system works because “while bringing benefits to themselves...the policies of the hegemonic powers were also beneficial to those other states that desired to and could take advantage of the international political and economic status quo” (page 145). Elsewhere, Gilpin gives further clarity to the idea of a hegemonic system by describing its structure as one manifesting “an unequivocal hierarchy of power and an unchallenged dominant or hegemonic power.” Robert Gilpin, “The Theory of Hegemonic War,” in *The Origin and Prevention of Major Wars*, R. Rotberg and T. Rabb, eds.



Proponents of this grand strategy find it attractive for a number of reasons.

One line of argument advocates U.S. pursuit of hegemony primarily because of security and economic considerations. This school views an international system characterized by hegemony and a clear hierarchy of power as more favorable to the interests of the hegemonic power, as well as inherently more peaceful and stable in general.<sup>16</sup> By this logic, while the hegemon's discretion is limited by the need to maintain the buy-in of supporting states, the hegemon can set and maintain the rules of the system in a manner favorable to its own interests. A prime example is the status of the American dollar as the world's reserve currency, enabling the United States to borrow more cheaply on the international markets and to maintain a debt level well beyond what other states can sustain.

Moreover, this logic sees a hegemonic international system as naturally more stable and peaceful than the others. Because of the clear hierarchy of power, rational states will be unlikely to challenge the much more powerful hegemon, and thus the hegemon will be able and willing to enforce the rules of the system.<sup>17</sup> When challenged, the hegemon is able to assert its authority and reestablish the rules of the system at a relatively low cost, as the United States did following Baghdad's invasion of Kuwait in 1990. Advocates of this argument point to the striking peacefulness and stability in the relations among major powers since 1991 under U.S. unipolarity and, within the West, under U.S. hegemony since 1945.<sup>18</sup>

A variant of this line of argument that is particularly influential today views U.S. hegemony as necessary to the advancement and propagation of liberal democracy, which

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(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 16. A more succinct definition is provided by Robert Keohane and Joseph Nye. According to them, hegemony is a situation in which "one state is powerful enough to maintain the essential rules governing interstate relations, and willing to do so." Robert Keohane and Joseph Nye, *Power and Interdependence: World Politics in Transition* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1977), 44.

<sup>16</sup> See, for instance, Bradley A. Thayer, "In Defense of Primacy," *The National Interest*, November/December 2006: 32-37.

<sup>17</sup> See, for instance, the 2001 Quadrennial Defense Review's discussion of the concept of "dissuasion" (page 12).

<sup>18</sup> See, for instance, Robert Kagan, "The Price of Power: The Benefits of U.S. Defense Spending Far Outweigh the Costs," *The Weekly Standard*, January 24, 2011: 27-33.

it sees as both a vital national objective and a crucial security interest.<sup>19</sup> This line of argument builds upon the hegemonic stability theory, which holds that the international system is anarchic and requires the exertion of a hegemon to impose stability and rules, and, further, adds an ideological component—the necessity of fostering liberal democracy. By this logic, because interstate relations and conflict are largely determined by the ideological compatibility among states, the United States can be reliably secure only if its strategic environment is populated by other liberal democratic states.<sup>20</sup>

The premise of this logic is the democratic peace theory—the proposition that liberal democratic states are inherently less bellicose towards one another. This proposition is buttressed by the impressive paucity in the historical record of liberal democracies going to war against each other.<sup>21</sup> In light of the relative weakness of other liberal democracies, the United States therefore has a strong interest in acquiring and maintaining a hegemonic power position in order to advance and protect liberal democracy, the adherents of which should be inherently well disposed towards the United States.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> The arguments that the spread of liberal democracy is a core value of American foreign policy and that it is necessary for American security are conceptually distinct, but they tend to go together. Those who believe that spreading democracy is a core American value, but not necessary for our security tend to be less supportive of using military force in this pursuit. Given the intellectual and moral ascendancy of liberal democracy in the modern world and especially in the United States, those who see its propagation as a vital security interest invariably see it also as a core value of American foreign policy.

<sup>20</sup> See, for instance, President George W. Bush, Second Inaugural Address, January 2005, and Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, “Rethinking the National Interest,” *Foreign Affairs*, July/August 2008: “We recognize that freedom and democracy are the only ideas that can, over time, lead to just and lasting stability.”

<sup>21</sup> For expositions of the democratic peace theory, see Bruce Russett, *Grasping the Democratic Peace* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994); Michael Doyle, “Kant, Liberal Legacies, and Foreign Affairs, Part I,” *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 12, no. 3, Summer 1983: 205-235; John M. Owen, “How Liberalism Produces Democratic Peace,” *International Security* 19:2, Autumn 1994: 87-125; and Charles Lipson, *Reliable Partners: How Democracies Have Made a Separate Peace* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005). It is important to note that the argument does not state that liberal democracies are inherently less bellicose but rather states that they are less bellicose *towards each other*. For a trenchant critique, see Sebastian Rosata, “The Flawed Logic of Democratic Peace Theory,” *American Political Science Review* 97, no. 4, November 2003: 585-602.

<sup>22</sup> See, for instance, Eric S. Edelman, *Understanding America’s Contested Primacy* (Washington, D.C.: Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, 2010, esp. 11-12. For a practical exposition of this position, see Senator John S. McCain, “America Must Be a Good Role Model,” *Financial*

Advocates of this position point to the character of NATO and other U.S. security alliances and partnerships, and to the uniformly illiberal and generally undemocratic nature of regimes hostile to the United States, as evidence of the favorable returns afforded to the United States by this approach. Proponents of this view are divided between those who emphasize the need for vigorous unilateralism and those who argue that a multilateral approach that draws strength from like-minded states is more productive.<sup>23</sup>

## **What are the objectives and purposes of the United States in its relations with the rest of the world?**

In the grand strategy of hegemony/supremacy, the objective of the United States in the international environment is the attainment and maintenance of hegemony or supremacy in order to ensure its safety and prosperity and, to some advocates, the spread and security of liberal democratic regimes.<sup>24</sup>

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*Times* (March 18, 2008), in which he called for a “League of Democracies.” As McCain argued, “This is not idealism. It is the truest form of realism. It is the democracies of the world that will provide the pillars upon which we can and must build an enduring peace.”

<sup>23</sup> For the former, see, e.g., David Frum and Richard Perle, *An End to Evil: How to Win the War on Terror* (New York: Random House, 2003). For the latter, see the writings of, inter alia, John Ikenberry and Anne Marie Slaughter, in, for example, G. John Ikenberry, *Liberal Order & Imperial Ambition* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2006) and G. John Ikenberry and Anne Marie Slaughter, eds., *Forging a World of Liberty Under Law: U.S. National Security in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. The Final Report of the Princeton Project on National Security* (Princeton: Woodrow Wilson School of International Affairs, 2006).

<sup>24</sup> For a highly influential document that shares key elements of this strategy, see the 2002 National Security Strategy of the United States of America. For a critique of this approach, see Robert Jervis, *American Foreign Policy in a New Era* (New York: Routledge, 2005). The Department of Defense under Secretary of Defense Richard Cheney also produced a document proposing a U.S. policy along these lines. Though never adopted, the document was apparently influential. See, for instance, Patrick E. Tyler, “U.S. Strategy Plan Calls for Insuring No Rivals Develop – A One-Superpower World,” *New York Times*, March 8, 1992. See also Niall Ferguson, *Colossus: The Rise and Fall of the American Empire* (London: Penguin, 2005). For an earlier influential statement, see William Kristol and Robert Kagan, “Toward a Neo-Reaganite Foreign Policy,” *Foreign Affairs*, July/August 1996.

## What is the nature of the international system and how can it be expected to affect the United States?

In this grand strategic approach, the international system is inherently anarchic, meaning that there is no legitimate and universally recognized international sovereign—i.e., a world government—that has a monopoly of force and that manages relations between independent states. In an anarchic system, self-generating and sustaining cooperation between states is very difficult in security matters because of the problems of trust, enforcement, relative gains, and disparate interests. According to this view, the international system gravitates either towards hegemonic control by a power that sets the terms of the international environment or towards chaos and frequent wars.<sup>25</sup> As a result, the United States can either set the terms of the system or have them set for it.

Given the relative weakness, especially in military terms, of the other advanced liberal democracies with which the United States is allied and shares a long tradition of common interest, dangerous anarchy would also tend towards leadership by another major power, such as China, that is less likely to structure the world system in ways favorable to the United States or liberal market mores. If the United States were to cede its position of supremacy, other states would be encouraged or forced to accommodate or mimic the new hegemon, including by abandoning liberal democracy for other systems of socio-political organization, which might in turn make the international system more unfriendly to U.S. interests.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> For an analysis along these lines, see John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2001). Ironically, while Mearsheimer's structural approach indicates that international politics is, by necessity, a competition for supremacy, he favors offshore balancing. For more on this point, see Barry Posen's review of Mearsheimer's book, "The Best Defense," *The National Interest*, Spring 2002: 119-126.

<sup>26</sup> For an argument along these lines, see Azar Gat, "The Return of Authoritarian Great Powers," *Foreign Affairs*, July/August 2007: "If any factor gave the liberal democracies their edge, it was above all the existence of the United States rather than any inherent advantage. In fact, had it not been for the United States, liberal democracy may well have lost the great struggles of the twentieth century." See also the Mission Statement of the Foreign Policy Initiative, available at [www.foreignpolicyi.org/about](http://www.foreignpolicyi.org/about); and Robert Kagan, "End of Dreams, Return of History," in M. Leffler and J. Legro, eds., *To Lead the World: American Strategy After the Bush Doctrine* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 36-59.

## **What does the United States need to do in order to fulfill its objectives and interests? What are the threats to the United States?**

According to the logic of hegemony, the objectives and interests of the United States are expansive, and, therefore, so are the threats to it. To attain and sustain a hegemonic position, the leader must be able to overmatch any plausible competitor and to exercise authority over and enforce the rules of the international system. This involves not only raw military and economic power but also the perception of the legitimacy and economic and social health of the hegemon.

Direct challenges to the authority of the hegemon or to its ability to enforce the rules of the system constitute a threat. Indeed, according to power transition theory, an important cause of major-power war is a rising power that seeks to challenge or even overturn the current order led by the hegemonic power.<sup>27</sup> In addition, actions, trends, or dynamics that would weaken the power or the perceptions of the will or legitimacy, of the hegemon to preside over the system would also constitute threats.

In light of this logic, the ability of the United States to act as hegemon in the current context may be seen to be threatened by, inter alia, the rise of China, the challenges posed to the United States and its allies by rogue states such as Iran and North Korea, the ideological challenge implicit in the apparent successes of “authoritarian capitalism,” the superior economic growth rates in emerging nations compared to that of the United States, and the efforts to forge a distinctive European policy independent of the transatlantic relationship.

## **What are the military implications of this strategy?**

The military requirements for the hegemonic grand strategy are extremely high because of the need for the leader to remain decisively supreme and the expansive conception of threats to the hegemonic position. Though the hegemon’s military does not need to be able to conquer all its prospective opponents at the same time, it must be able to overawe and ultimately defeat them and to impose its will upon them if they challenge it. This requires military capabilities sufficient to enable the hegemon to force its way on any individual or combination of states.<sup>28</sup> In practical terms, this means that the United States

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<sup>27</sup> See, for example, A.F.K. Organski, *World Politics* (New York: Knopf, 1958); and A.F.K. Organski and Jacek Kugler, *The War Ledger* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1980).

<sup>28</sup> See, for instance, American Enterprise Institute, The Heritage Foundation, Foreign Policy Initiative, *Defending Defense: Setting the Record Straight on U.S. Military Spending Requirements*, Gary

must be able to retain military superiority throughout the world. The United States therefore must be capable of militarily dominating China in the Western Pacific, Iran in the Middle East, and Russia's periphery, as well as rising nations such as India and Brazil, and rogue states such North Korea and Syria.

To the extent that advocates of the strategy view liberal democracies as inherently inclined to ally with the United States, the military forces that those countries bring to bear can reduce the military requirements for the United States. Most such advocates, however, note the relative military weakness of the liberal democracies allied with the United States and emphasize the collective-action problems inherent in alliance politics.<sup>29</sup>

### **Why is this strategy claimed to be superior to the alternatives?**

The grand strategy of pursuing hegemony is claimed to be superior because it promises to secure peace and favorable international terms for the hegemon in an international system characterized by a degree of stability and, to some degree, justice. Moreover, given the analytical baseline of the strategy, it presents itself as the most realistic because it recognizes that some country must dominate the international system and that it is best for the United States to be that country. It is asserted to be pragmatic as well, because U.S. efforts to attain and retain supremacy are buttressed by an immense and productive economy that can readily sustain rises in defense spending, a history of alliances with other powerful countries, a potent and universalistic ideological appeal, systemic and environmental weaknesses and vulnerabilities in potential competitors, and a perception of legitimacy in leadership.

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Schmitt and Thomas Donnelly, "Shore Up America's Air Superiority," *Wall Street Journal*, January 17, 2011; and Gary Schmitt and Thomas Donnelly, "The Big Squeeze," *Weekly Standard*, June. 7, 2010.

<sup>29</sup> See, for instance, former U.S. Ambassador to NATO Kurt Volker's comments on NATO, "West's Goal Must be Qaddafi's Removal," *Christian Science Monitor*, March 22, 2011. For more in-depth analyses of the difficulties of collective action in alliances, see; inter alia, Glenn Snyder, *Alliance Politics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997) and Mancur Olson, *The Logic of Collective Action: Public Goods and the Theory of Groups* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971). For a more positive view of the contributions of other liberal democracies to maintaining the predominance of the liberal order headed by the United States, see G. John Ikenberry and Anne Marie Slaughter, *The Final Report of the Princeton Project on National Security*, 29-30.

## What are the critiques of this strategy?

The major critiques of this grand strategy argue that hegemony is not necessary in order to meet core American objectives and provide security. Moreover, these critiques argue that the pursuit of hegemony can—and, for the United States going forward, likely will—involve the nation in prohibitively and perhaps disastrously costly conflicts and commitments, and may cause or accelerate its decline. Because hegemony is unnecessary for American security and because the attempt to attain or retain it is very costly and possibly disastrous, critics argue that the United States should forgo the attempt.<sup>30</sup>

It is important to note that the logic of these critiques does not necessarily imply that American hegemony is bad or corrupting, though some do make those arguments.<sup>31</sup> Instead, most critics argue that the attempt to attain or retain hegemony is unwise because it is ultimately untenable, given demographic, technological, and other developments, and because it is damaging to U.S. interests and security in light of the costs in lives, resources, and opportunities.<sup>32</sup> In this view, a strategy that seeks hegemony courts unneeded conflict and expense and will sooner or later lead to overstretch and

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<sup>30</sup> See, for instance, John J. Mearsheimer, “Imperial by Design,” *The National Interest* (January/February 2011), 16-34, and Christopher Layne, “The Unipolar Illusion: Why New Great Powers Will Rise,” *International Security* 4, no. 17: 5-51; and Samuel P. Huntington, “The Lonely Superpower,” *Foreign Affairs* (March/April 1999): 35-49.

<sup>31</sup> For arguments that hegemony is corrupting, see, e.g., Patrick J. Buchanan, *A Republic, Not an Empire* (Washington, D.C.: Regnery, 2002), and Andrew J. Bacevich, *The New American Militarism: How Americans are Seduced by War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

<sup>32</sup> For an analysis of the changing balances of power and wealth, see Fareed Zakaria, *The Post-American World* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2008). For an official assessment along these lines, see National Intelligence Council, *Global Trends 2025: A Transformed World* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2008). See also Stephen J. Hadley and William J. Perry et al., *The QDR in Perspective: Meeting America’s National Security Needs in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. The Final Report of the Quadrennial Defense Review Independent Panel* (Washington, D.C., 2010). For arguments that focus on the rising challenges to U.S. military supremacy, see, e.g., Andrew Krepinevich, Robert Martinage, and Robert Work, *The Challenges to U.S. National Security* (Washington, D.C.: Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, 2008); Andrew Krepinevich, “The Pentagon’s Wasting Assets: The Eroding Foundations of American Power,” *Foreign Affairs* (July/August 2009); and Andrew Krepinevich, “The Challenges After Gates,” *Defense News*, Apr. 11, 2011. For emphasis on the increasing costs to the United States of maintaining its international preeminence, see Michael Mandelbaum, *The Frugal Superpower* (New York: Public Affairs, 2010).

decline.<sup>33</sup> Indeed, some of the most prominent analysts of hegemony in international relations argue that the very act of exercising hegemony sows the seeds of decline.<sup>34</sup>

## **What are the implications of this strategy for the U.S. Navy?**

For the Navy, the grand strategy of hegemony means very substantial obligations to command the seas and to enable forced entry along the Eurasian periphery such that the United States can, if necessary, impose its will on opponents. For instance, the Navy would be expected to overawe and, if necessary, overpower the Chinese navy. From a resource perspective, logically the strategy calls for very substantial investments in naval forces. The strategy also requires equally, if not more, substantial investments in ground, non-naval air forces, space and cyber assets, and all the other appurtenances of a military complex sufficient to dominate the international security environment—not just the seas. Thus, in practical terms, the strategy puts a premium on the ability of ground forces to operate and prevail on the Eurasian land mass, indicating that in tradeoffs between maritime and ground capabilities the former might not have the upper hand. In terms of implications for deployment patterns, this strategy would require a very substantial forward presence to dissuade potential challengers as well as potentially independent-minded allies and partners.

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<sup>33</sup> See, for instance, Paul Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers* (New York: Vintage, 1989), and Charles Kindleberger, *World Economic Primacy: 1500-1900* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996).

<sup>34</sup> Gilpin himself argues along these lines, in *War & Change in World Politics*, chapter 4. For the opposing point of view, see William C. Wohlforth, “The Stability of a Unipolar World,” *International Security* 24, no. 1, Summer 1999: 5-41. Some argue, for instance, that the reserve role of the dollar has tended to encourage distortive and harmful effects in the U.S. economic position. See, e.g., C. Fred Bergsten, “The Dollar and the Deficits: How Washington Can Prevent the Next Crisis,” *Foreign Affairs*, November/December 2009, and Michael Pettis, “America Must Give Up on the Dollar,” *Financial Times*, April 13, 2011.



## A grand strategy of selective engagement

Another school in the debate argues for a grand strategy of “selective engagement.”<sup>35</sup> This group argues that the United States should maintain a strong military position in regions of vital interest to Washington. This strategy is designed to ensure stability in key places on favorable terms to the United States, but should eschew the goal of hegemony. This strategy takes seriously the argument that stability is not necessarily self-generating and that therefore the absence of American power could lead to chaos or to domination by an unfriendly power. At the same time, it holds that the areas for which this is relevant to the United States are limited and that the United States does not need truly to dominate these regions in order for stability to endure. This caution is also informed by an assessment that an attempt to attain and retain hegemony can lead to overstretch, unnecessary conflict, unsustainable free-riding, and balancing against U.S. power.

The strategy therefore seeks to balance these conflicting equities by preserving robust American commitments abroad but narrowing their scope. While, not surprisingly, advocates of the strategy differ in their estimates of what the United States should commit itself to overseas, most tend to cluster around the maintenance of stability and openness to commerce in Europe, Northeast Asia, and the Persian Gulf region.<sup>36</sup> The U.S. economy is intimately tied to the ability to trade with these regions, and their domination by an adversary would endow such a nation with immense industrial strength to threaten core

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<sup>35</sup> Variants of the case for selective engagement include, e.g., Art, *A Grand Strategy*, esp. chapter 4; Posen, and Ross, “Competing Visions for U.S. Grand Strategy,” 17-23; William E. Odom and Robert Dujarric, *America’s Liberal Empire* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003); Stephen Van Evera, “Why Europe Matters, Why the Third World Doesn’t: American Grand Strategy After the Cold War,” *Journal of Strategic Studies* 13, no. 2, June 1990: 1-51; Patrick M. Cronin, *Restraint: Recalibrating American Strategy* (Washington, D.C.: Center for a New American Security, 2010). Henry Kissinger would probably fit best into the category of selective engagers; see, for instance, Kissinger, *Does America Need a Foreign Policy?*

<sup>36</sup> Art, *A Grand Strategy for America*, 136-150, and Art, “Selective Engagement After Bush,” in *Finding Our Way*, 23-42; Posen and Ross, “Competing Visions for U.S. Grand Strategy,” 20. George Kennan identified roughly these same regions as the vital areas for U.S. strategy as far back as the late 1940s. George F. Kennan, *Realities of American Foreign Policy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1954), 64. Samuel Huntington subscribed to a strategy that was effectively akin to selective engagement, but, given his emphasis on the salience of civilizational distinctions in international order, limited U.S. focus to the West. Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996), ch. 12.

U.S. security interests. Advocates of this strategy are skeptical of, if not outright opposed to, employment of U.S. military power outside of the defense of these regions, believing it to be unnecessary, wasteful, dangerous, and, some think, immoral.<sup>37</sup> The strategy is basically one of focused preeminence: the United States benefits from the stability of the key power centers of the world, and a very substantial U.S. role and considerable U.S. presence in those regions is practically necessary for that stability to endure.<sup>38</sup>

## **What are the objectives and purposes of the United States in its relations with the rest of the world?**

In the grand strategy of selective engagement, the objective of the United States in the international environment is the preservation of a beneficial peace in regions of the world of high importance to U.S. security and prosperity, and the conservation of military energy and force with respect to problems only tangentially related to these regions.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> See, for instance, Richard K. Betts, "A Disciplined Defense: How to Regain Strategic Solvency," *Foreign Affairs* (November/December 2007); Betts, *U.S. National Security Strategy: Lenses and Landmarks*, Princeton Project on National Security, Nov. 2004; and Betts, "Is Strategy an Illusion?" 46-50.

<sup>38</sup> See Art, "Selective Engagement After Bush," p. 32: "Selective engagement seeks to mold the international environment in order to make it more congenial to U.S. interests, rather than to just allow adverse events to happen. In this sense it is a precautionary strategy, and the assumption is that it is costlier to have to deal with adverse events than to prevent them from happening in the first place. Of course, not all adverse events can be prevented and not all things can be controlled. What selective engagement does is project U.S. military power in ways that can help tilt the balance of international forces so as to advance America's six national interest. Selective engagement is a strategy that seeks to shape, not control, the international environment."

<sup>39</sup> Art presents a slightly different and longer list: to protect the homeland from attack; to maintain a "deep peace" among the Eurasian powers; to ensure access to oil; to preserve an open international order; to prevent mass murders in civil wars; and to prevent severe climate change. Art, "Selective Engagement After Bush," 28. The first four of these may be summarized by reference to a favorable peace in key regions of the world. The last two are disputable. For a general view of American foreign policy along these lines, see the inputs of Brent Scowcroft in Zbigniew Brzezinski and Brent Scowcroft, *America and the World: Conversations on the Future of American Foreign Policy* (New York: Basic Books, 2008).

## What is the nature of the international system, and how can it be expected to affect the United States?

The grand strategy of selective engagement is based largely on the so-called “classical” realism associated with such thinkers as Hans Morgenthau.<sup>40</sup> From this analytical vantage point, the international system is inherently anarchical and states are necessarily competitive and focused on securing themselves. The United States cannot therefore rely on the good intentions of other nations or on the beneficial, self-generating dynamics of the international system, to meet its goals in the world. Nations seeking their own security and self-interest, however, can and do cooperate to defend themselves and foster stability.<sup>41</sup> Moreover, depending on the state of technology, the military capabilities of the various states, and other factors, the international system can reach equilibrium without hegemony.<sup>42</sup> Indeed, under such conditions, stabilizing steps such as allying and balancing are not only possible but indeed likely.

Hegemony is therefore a possible structure for enforcing stability on favorable terms—but it is not the only one and, given the costs and dangers associated with pursuit or attempted maintenance of hegemony, it may not be the optimal one.<sup>43</sup> Yet the strategy of selective engagement recognizes that balancing and allying may not be sufficiently effective to deter or defeat an aspiring regional hegemon and so active engagement by the United States in key regions may be prudent.

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<sup>40</sup> See Hans J. Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace*, fourth edition (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1967).

<sup>41</sup> Charles Glaser, “Realists as Optimists: Cooperation as Self-Help,” *International Security* 19, no. 3, Winter 1994/1995, pp. 50-90.

<sup>42</sup> For a useful brief summation of this line of analysis, often termed “defensive realism,” see Posen, “The Best Defense,” 119-120. More broadly, this resembles the arguments for the behavior of free markets. For a classical argument along these lines connecting this analytical approach to the Scottish Enlightenment, see David Hume, “Of the Balance of Power,” available in *Essays Moral, Political, and Literary* (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1987).

<sup>43</sup> See, for instance, Cronin, *Restraint*, 5-13.

## **What does the United States need to do in order to fulfill its objectives and interests? What are the threats to the United States?**

In light of these dynamics, the basic interests of the United States include preserving favorable stability in the key regions of the world. The United States can have these objectives satisfied under conditions short of hegemony, such as through membership in, including leadership of, regional alliances. U.S. strategic efforts should therefore be directed towards shoring up especially threatened alliances, balancing potential adversaries, and ensuring that key regions are stable and favorably disposed towards the United States. Going beyond this, however, unnecessarily courts overreach and conflict.<sup>44</sup> In particular, the United States should seek to preserve a favorable balance of power in Europe, North-east Asia, and the Persian Gulf region. A forward military presence and a strong security commitment to these regions (or key nations within them) are logical steps in a selective engagement approach.<sup>45</sup>

The key threats to U.S. interests, on the other hand, are adversaries or rivals that imperil or undermine the favorable balance of power. In the Middle East, Iran's aggressive behavior and threats to the Gulf states would be a primary concern. An absence of U.S. power in the region might allow Iran to achieve regional primacy, because of the weakness of the Gulf states and the internal divisions among the Middle Eastern nations. In East Asia, the rapid growth of China and the possibility that China might seek not just to integrate into the existing order but to supplant the United States as the historical leader in the region, would constitute a serious concern. While the United States could accommodate the growth of Chinese power, presumably through a balance of power involving the other relevant states in the region, it would not be prepared to allow China to dictate the rules of the system in East Asia. This would require continued substantial U.S. engagement because without U.S. involvement states such as Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, Vietnam, and India might not cooperate effectively enough (or be able) to restrain Chinese power.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> See, for instance, Elbridge Colby, "Restoring Deterrence," *Orbis* (Summer 2007), 413-428.

<sup>45</sup> For the benefits of forward presence, see Art, *A Grand Strategy for America*, 136-145.

<sup>46</sup> Otto von Bismarck, for instance, was able to attain German primacy in Europe during the latter part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in large part by effective manipulation of the surrounding states. See, e.g., Josef Joffe, "'Bismarck' or 'Britain'? Towards an American Grand Strategy After Bipolarity," *International Security* 19, no. 4, Spring 1995: 94-117.

## **What are the military implications of this strategy?**

The military requirements for the grand strategy of selective engagement are very substantial because of the need for the United States to retain a strong military capability in the key regions of the world. U.S. forces in East Asia, Europe, and the Persian Gulf need to be able to help defend threatened allies and deter and defeat aggression by adversaries or rivals. This requires highly capable air, naval, space, and C4ISR (command, control, communications, computers, intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance) capabilities. Ground forces need to be robust—but, because the strategy does not seek dominance, they do not need to be overweening.

For three reasons, however, the military requirements of the strategy are less stringent than those in a strategy of hegemony: because U.S. objectives are limited to these vital regions; because, while U.S. forces need to protect allied and partner nations, they do not necessarily need to decisively defeat opponents; and because the United States enjoys the advantages of an entrenched and supported defender in most of these regions. Future U.S. military investments would therefore tend to be channeled towards competing in the Western Pacific and Southeast Asia with a potential near-peer or peer rival such as China, as opposed to favoring counterinsurgency and stabilization forces designed to minimize unrest in failing states outside of those key regions.

## **Why is this strategy claimed to be superior to the alternatives?**

Proponents of the strategy of selective engagement argue that it is the most balanced grand strategy for the United States. On the one hand they assert that it recognizes that a favorable stability is not necessarily self-generating, so a strong American presence in key regions is warranted. On the other, it recognizes the limits of American power and the dangers of overreach, and so calls for forgoing the quest for global dominance and instead focusing U.S. efforts upon regions where American interests are substantial and clear and where the U.S. presence is required for a favorable peace.<sup>47</sup> The strategy is also attractive because it treads a well-worn path; it narrows American engagement to those

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<sup>47</sup> Although careful to avoid explicit endorsement of any one school, former Secretary of Defense Robert Gates seemed to be supportive of a more selective approach to America's military role in the world, as expressed in his 2011 speeches at West Point and the American Enterprise Institute. See "Speech of Secretary of Defense Robert M. Gates to the U.S. Military Academy, February 25, 2011," available at [www.defense.gov/speeches/speech.aspx?speechid=1539](http://www.defense.gov/speeches/speech.aspx?speechid=1539), and his May 24 speech to the American Enterprise Institute. In both speeches he made clear his view that the United States should avoid long and costly land wars on mainland Eurasia.

regions with which the United States has long been linked, rather than asking for an expansion of commitments to an American people skeptical of new engagements.

### **What are the critiques of this strategy?**

Critics of selective engagement tend to point to its apparent virtue—balance—as the root of its apparent inadequacy. One group of critics argues that selective engagement is not actually sufficiently selective, but rather commits the United States to a long-term presence in much of the advanced world and inevitable involvement in conflicts both in those regions and, if history is any guide, around them.<sup>48</sup> These critics note that the strategy of selective engagement, while perhaps more restrained than one of pursuit of hegemony, is nonetheless prey to many of the same problems of overstretch, unnecessary conflict, and domestic distortion.

Conversely, proponents of pursuing hegemony contend that a strategy of selective engagement would be insufficient to shore up American preeminence and thus would lead to a dangerous decline in American power. Allies, adversaries, and bystanders would all take note of American reticence, with the effect of undermining U.S. leadership.<sup>49</sup> Moreover, such critics point out that the borders of American interest cannot be so clearly defined as selective engagement would wish—events that transpire outside of the areas designated for American focus can and often do have immense consequences upon them. This in turn means, they argue, that the American purview should be broader than just these regions.

### **What are the implications of this strategy for the U.S. Navy?**

For the Navy, the grand strategy of selective engagement means a continuation of its existing very substantial obligations to command the oceans and to provide assured access to and protection for the key regions of U.S. interest. The U.S. Navy would be expected to overpower any attempt by the Chinese navy to attack, blockade, or coerce U.S. allies in the Western Pacific or by the Iranian naval forces to do the same in the Persian Gulf region. Moreover, because ground forces have a narrower mission in the strategy of

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<sup>48</sup> For critiques of selective engagement, see Stephen Walt, *Taming American Power: The Global Response to U.S. Primacy* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2005), 220-222. See also Christopher Preble, *The Power Problem: How American Military Dominance Makes Us Less Safe, Less Prosperous, and Less Free* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009), 11.

<sup>49</sup> Edelman, *Understanding America's Contested Supremacy*, 14.

selective engagement than in that of hegemony, the Navy would have a stronger relative claim on resources. With respect to deployment patterns, the strategy of selective engagement would focus on regular naval deployments to key regions such as the Western Pacific and Persian Gulf, and abjure deployments to less important areas.

## **A grand strategy of offshore balancing**

A third school in the grand strategy debate is the “offshore balancing” approach.<sup>50</sup> Offshore balancing shares many of the analytical assumptions and policy prescriptions of selective engagement, including a concern that stability is not self-generating, that the areas of genuinely important interest to the United States are limited, and that overstretch is a likely consequence of the pursuit of hegemony.

But offshore balancing differs from selective engagement in that it advocates a considerably more aloof American approach that would significantly change the U.S. strategic posture abroad. In particular, it calls for withdrawing the American military from Asia, the Persian Gulf, and Europe, and the reintroducing those forces only if one of these key regions appears in danger of falling under the sway of a regional hegemon. Proponents argue that the absence of a forward U.S. military presence would profitably force these regions to sort out their own security order through a balance of power.

Proponents of this grand strategy emphasize that the United States would save much in terms of lives, resources, and political capital through a more detached posture, but would nonetheless retain a substantial military capability to intervene again if circumstances warranted it. The strategy might be characterized as one of latent power balancing for regions of key U.S. interest.

## **What are the objectives and purposes of the United States in its relations with the rest of the world?**

In the grand strategy of offshore balancing, the aim of the United States in the international environment is to ensure that no regional hegemon takes over one of the

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<sup>50</sup> For arguments for offshore balancing, see Mearsheimer, “Imperial by Design,” 31-34; Christopher Layne, “From Preponderance to Offshore Balancing,” *International Security* 22, no. 1, Summer 1997: 112-124; Stephen Walt, *Taming American Power*, 222-223; Posen, “A Grand Strategy of Restraint,” 94-102; and Christopher Layne, *The Peace of Illusions: American Grand Strategy from 1940 to the Present* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006).

world's key regions, while the U.S. husband its resources and commitments to promote its long term prosperity and minimize its involvement in painful and unnecessary engagements. In a strategy of offshore balancing, the United States would stay active in international political and economic affairs, but it would only deploy its military in situations in which a hostile power sought hegemony over a critical region of the world.

## **What is the nature of the international system, and how can it be expected to affect the United States?**

The strategy of offshore balancing proceeds from a variant of classical realism. Many of its underlying tenets are similar to those of selective engagement. Where it primarily differs is in its greater confidence in the effectiveness and durability of regional balances of power arising and persisting independently of direct American involvement.

Fundamentally, offshore balancing views most strategic environments as likely to equilibrate at a balance among the relevant powers, rather than tending towards hegemony or chaos. Moreover, because it sees states as resolutely self-seeking, leadership by any state will tend to encourage and accommodate “free riding” by the others. Withdrawing offshore, conversely, will be more likely to compel regional actors to pay for their own security.<sup>51</sup> If sufficient or effective local balancing does fail to arise, however, the United States will be relatively insulated from the negative effects of such deleterious developments because of its size and insularity.<sup>52</sup> Similarly, the theory posits that international commerce will continue to flow even in the absence of a dominant power, so a detached posture will not negatively affect American prosperity.<sup>53</sup>

Advocates of this theory argue that, given the benefits in reduced defense requirements and less exposure to hostility generated by interventions in the affairs of other countries,

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<sup>51</sup> For the difficult-to-counteract tendency for free-riding within an alliance with a preeminent member, see Mancur Olson and Richard Zeckhauser, “An Economic Theory of Alliances,” *Review of Economics and Statistics* 48, 1966: 266–79.

<sup>52</sup> For an analysis of the theoretical assumptions of offshore balancing, see, e.g., Christopher Layne, “From Preponderance to Offshore Balancing,” 113-119.

<sup>53</sup> For an example of this type of analysis, see Eugene Gholz and Daryl Press, *Energy Alarmism: The Myths that Make Americans Worry About Oil* (Washington, D.C.: Cato Institute, 2007).



indeed, the United States will actually profit.<sup>54</sup> Since the nature of the international system means that a strong U.S. presence and guiding hand is unnecessary for American security and prosperity, the United States can prudently withdraw “over the horizon” from the regions of key interest.

## **What does the United States need to do in order to fulfill its objectives and interests? What are the threats to the United States?**

Like selective engagement, the strategy of offshore balancing narrows the scope of U.S. focus to areas of principal interest and danger to American security and prosperity—meaning Europe, Northeast Asia, and the Persian Gulf region. Unlike selective engagement, however, offshore balancing calls for the United States to lessen its active involvement in these regions by minimizing its alliance commitments or withdrawing from them entirely, reducing the deployment of U.S. military forces abroad and redeploying them closer to or within the United States, refusing to intervene in regional conflicts that do not directly implicate a relevant region’s balance of power, and focusing the role of the U.S. military on preparing for intervention in key areas should an aspiring regional hegemon arise.<sup>55</sup>

Advocates of the policy differ as to how thoroughgoing to make this move offshore. Some advocates call for more continuity with existing commitments and deployments, but with far greater restraint and a much lighter footprint.<sup>56</sup> Others call for withdrawal from NATO and for the encouragement of the European Union’s defense integration and augmentation effort, termination of the mutual security treaty with Tokyo, pulling U.S. forces out of South Korea and the Persian Gulf area, and the adoption of more accommodating postures towards China and Russia with respect to their regional interests.<sup>57</sup> Broadly, however, the logic of the strategy calls for significantly reducing the U.S. footprint abroad and husbanding national power in preparation for the possible rise of a nation seeking dominance of a key region.

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<sup>54</sup> See, for instance, Robert Pape, *Dying to Win: The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism* (New York: Random House, 2005).

<sup>55</sup> See, e.g., Mearsheimer, “Imperial by Design,” 31.

<sup>56</sup> See, e.g., Stephen M. Walt, *Taming American Power*, 222.

<sup>57</sup> Christopher Layne, *The Peace of Illusions*, 186-190. Arguments along Layne’s lines resemble isolationism, but differ in their willingness to reengage in Eurasia to prevent its domination by a rival hegemon (page 160).

## **What are the military implications of this strategy?**

While a strategy of offshore balancing would markedly reduce the military requirements related to forward presence, deterrence, and assurance, the United States would need to retain either an active or a latent capability to generate sufficient force to intervene decisively in key regions in a manner timely and effective enough to prevent the consolidation of a hostile sphere of influence by a regional hegemon in one of those regions.

The logic of offshore balancing directs that U.S. forces would only be dispatched once it had become clear that regional balancing against a rising power was failing; therefore, U.S. forces would need to have especially powerful counter-anti-access and area denial capabilities, as well as the characteristics necessary to sustain operations at long distances from bases in the United States and hold territory or space wrested from an adversary. Moreover, for more “offshore” versions of the strategy, U.S. forces would need to be able to operate almost entirely independently of other countries in order to preserve U.S. freedom of action and avoid forcing political leaders into intervening prematurely in order to capitalize on the military advantages afforded by allies. As with selective engagement, U.S. forces would be shaped, sized, and postured primarily for contingencies in Europe, Northeast Asia, and the Persian Gulf.

While day-to-day demands on the U.S. military would be less in offshore balancing than in selective engagement, it is not clear whether total military requirements would be less burdensome. This would depend on the tradeoffs between the deterrent effects of forward presence and alliance cohesion as against the greater military obligations stemming from such commitments.

## **Why is this strategy claimed to be superior to the alternatives?**

Proponents of the strategy of offshore balancing contend that it is more cost-effective in terms of American lives and resources, less likely to generate unnecessary and dangerous hostility, and more sustainable over the long term than the alternatives. Its claims to superiority are very similar to those of selective engagement in emphasizing both the virtues of the restraint and the importance of maintaining adequate power to deal with an uncertain and potentially dangerous international situation. Proponents assert its superiority over selective engagement, however, by arguing that selective engagement is, as one analyst put it, “not selective enough.”<sup>58</sup> In this view, selective engagement would

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<sup>58</sup> Stephen Walt, *Taming American Power*, 221.

not provide the intellectual and institutional discipline necessary to ensure restraint and might end up looking similar to a strategy of primacy. By actually reducing or even eliminating the American footprint abroad, offshore balancing would make it far more difficult for the United States to get embroiled in the kinds of conflicts and engagements that offshore balancers decry.

## **What are the critiques of this strategy?**

Critics of offshore balancing argue that the strategy rests on a mistaken conception of how the international system operates. They argue that such a grand strategy would likely lead to instability and conflict that would in turn threaten important American interests. Critics contend that removing the U.S. security presence not only from unstable areas but even from core regions of U.S. interest would leave these areas prey to disorder and to ambitious and domineering powers, and anti-system organizations (e.g., al Qaeda). Pointing to the historical examples of the World Wars and the Cold War, these critics are skeptical that traditional U.S. allies in these regions would effectively balance rising powers unfriendly or hostile to U.S. interests.

Moreover, they see the proposed solution to this problem proffered by offshore balancing—the reinsertion of American military power once regional balances of power appear to be failing—as inadequate, dangerous, or too costly. They point to the difficulty in ascertaining when and how to reintroduce American military power once it has been removed; to the higher military requirements for penetrating contested or even denied regions from without; and to the possibility that such an attempt might fail, and thus to its weakness as a deterrent to threats to American interests. Some critics, primarily in the democratic hegemonist and integrationist camps, also contend that offshore balancing does not give enough scope to the promotion of American values abroad.

## **What are the implications of this strategy for the U.S. Navy?**

In a strategy of offshore balancing, the Navy would play a central role. In peacetime, it would be the forward face of U.S. power, as U.S. ground and air forces would be based closer to home. In wartime, the Navy would be responsible for ensuring the transport, protection, and effective penetration of ground and air forces into denied areas in order to restore regional balances of power.

Because of the especially stringent demands that this requirement would impose on ground and air forces in the event of a necessary intervention, these forces would need to

be especially powerful for they would have to compensate for the advantages foresworn by waiting until a regional hegemon arose and upset the local balance. This would likely mean that investment and resource allocations would remain balanced among the services.<sup>59</sup> Also, offshore balancing could actually substantially lessen the Navy's posture of permanent forward-deployed hubs and stations, compelling it to rely more on forces husbanded at home in readiness to be surged rapidly when needed.

## **A grand strategy of integration of U.S. strategy into international collective efforts**

Another school in the debate takes a fundamentally different approach to the problems of international security than the three outlined above. Members of this school argue that the traditional geopolitical concerns or pitfalls that justified strategies such as hegemony or selective engagement have been or are being transcended, and that the serious challenges facing the United States in the future are novel and transnational in character. Consequently, this school argues that the United States should not focus on traditional power considerations, but rather pool its power with that of other like-minded nations in order to address these challenges more aptly. The strategy of the United States, in this view, should be to integrate its own security considerations with those of others, since they are invariably connected and best protected collectively. To proponents of this type of strategy, peace and security are indivisible among nations.

This approach generally rests on an assessment that the developing international environment is increasingly characterized by stable peace among advanced nations.<sup>60</sup> Some see this as emerging through agreement on liberal "norms" and believe that such agreement sharply diminishes the security dilemmas that have historically afflicted the international system.<sup>61</sup> To these analysts, this dynamic has led and is leading to the creation of so-called "security communities"—groups of states in which war is

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<sup>59</sup> See the concluding remarks of Captain Peter Swartz, USN (Ret) and Rear Admiral Michael McDevitt, USN (Ret) at the CNA Conference on Offshore Balancing.

<sup>60</sup> See, e.g., John Mueller, *Retreat from Doomsday: The Obsolescence of Major War* (New York: Basic Books, 1989), and *The Remnants of War* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004).

<sup>61</sup> See, e.g., Alexander Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), and James J. Sheehan, *Where Have All the Soldiers Gone? The Transformation of Modern Europe* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 2008).

unthinkable.<sup>62</sup> Others argue that war is anachronistic because nuclear weapons make serious war and certainly outright conquest effectively impossible.<sup>63</sup> Still others point to influences such as economic interdependence and the proposition that war no longer pays.<sup>64</sup> Most agree, however, that the dangers of interstate competition and, ultimately, the prospects of interstate war are drastically lower than in the past. This leads advocates to conclude that classical strategies such as power balancing or hegemony are unnecessary.<sup>65</sup>

But the waning of major war does not mean inaction. Rather, advocates contend that the chief perils to U.S. security are transnational in character. They emphasize both the dangers and the inherently extra-national aspects of proliferation, pandemic disease, resource scarcity, migration, terrorism, economic instability, and other such threats. Because these problems are transnational in nature, they must be addressed through cooperative action among nations.<sup>66</sup> This leads proponents to urge much fuller integration of U.S. policy objectives and capabilities into the international community or some subset thereof. In effect, the approach calls for the partial or full subsuming of U.S. “strategy” into the “strategy” of the collective, because traditional strategies are unnecessary and possibly dangerous, and because only such a pooling or subsuming can adequately meet contemporary challenges.

## **What are the objectives and purposes of the United States in its relations with the rest of the world?**

In this approach, the objective of the United States is progressively to integrate itself into a broader international system oriented towards addressing transnational challenges and

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<sup>62</sup> On security communities, see, e.g., Emanuel Adler and Michael Barnett, eds., *Security Communities* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

<sup>63</sup> See, e.g., Stephen Van Evera, “A Farewell to Geopolitics,” in *To Lead the World*, 11-35.

<sup>64</sup> Richard Rosecrance, *The Rise of the Trading State* (New York: Basic Books, 1986).

<sup>65</sup> There is also an aspirational strand to this approach. Arguments for this system, such as those by President Woodrow Wilson, predate the sense that balance of power politics had been actually transcended; rather, they were advocated as a *means* of transcending the anarchy of classical power politics. Today, however, most advocates point to the declining incidence and salience of war mostly as a presumption for the approach rather than as a product of it. For an assessment, see Charles Lipson, “Is the Future of Collective Security Like the Past?” in George W. Downs, ed., *Collective Security Beyond the Cold War* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994), 105-132.

<sup>66</sup> Van Evera, “A Farewell to Geopolitics,” 17.

strengthening the pacific character of interstate relations, specifically by finding effective ways to pool its power with that of like-minded others in an increasingly effective and expansive cooperative venture or concert. Some advocates call merely for a greater integration of U.S. objectives with those of other nations through existing institutions.<sup>67</sup> Others call for a self-conscious concert of powers to operate together to preserve and extend peace.<sup>68</sup> In the strongest versions, the United States would commit to a collective security agreement in which a group of states would agree to act collectively against any state that transgressed the rules agreed to, primarily through aggression.<sup>69</sup>

## **What is the nature of the international system, and how can it be expected to affect the United States?**

To proponents of this approach, the international system has fundamentally changed, is fundamentally changing, or is capable of changing to minimize the salience of strategic competition and enable lasting cooperation and comity among states.<sup>70</sup>

Some combination of the perceived costliness of war in a nuclear world, the growth and entrenchment of pacific liberal values, increased economic interdependence and perceptions of the attraction of absolute material gains over relative power advantages, the declining attractiveness of territorial acquisition, and other factors has transformed at

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<sup>67</sup> See, for instance, Richard Haass, "The Case for Integration," *The National Interest*, Fall 2005: 22-29, and Richard Haass, *The Opportunity* (New York: Public Affairs, 2005).

<sup>68</sup> See, for instance, Harald Muller, "Framework Conditions," in James Acton and George Perkovich, eds., *Abolishing Nuclear Weapons: A Debate* (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie, 2009), 171-178, and Harald Muller and Carsten Rauch, "Managing Power Transition with a Concert of Powers?" Paper presented at the annual meeting of the International Studies Association Annual Conference, "Global Governance: Political Authority in Transition," March 16, 2011.

<sup>69</sup> See, for instance, Charles A. Kupchan and Clifford A. Kupchan, "Concerts, Collective Security, and the Future of Europe," *International Security* 16, no. 1, Summer 1991: 114-161, and Charles A. Kupchan and Clifford A. Kupchan, "The Promise of Collective Security," *International Security* 20, no. 1, Summer 1995: 52-61. For a classic argument for the case, see Inis L. Claude, Jr., *Swords into Ploughshares: The Problems and Progress of International Organization* (New York: Random House, 1956), esp. ch. 12. For an older debate on collective security, see Marina S. Finkelstein and Lawrence S. Finkelstein, eds., *Collective Security* (San Francisco: Chandler, 1966).

<sup>70</sup> For a defense of the theory of collective of security against its critics, see George W. Downs and Keisuke Iida, "Assessing the Theoretical Case Against Collective Security," in Downs, ed., *Collective Security After the Cold War*, 17-39.

least segments of the international environment.<sup>71</sup> Where states might once have operated under a perpetual anxiety about the possibility of being attacked, today such concerns are becoming or can be made remote and even unfounded. Because of this, strategies oriented towards addressing the dangers attendant to the uncertain traditional strategic environment are no longer appropriate, and may actually contribute to instability, not least by weakening the collective will and effort needed to further root these pacific developments.<sup>72</sup> In essence, the dynamics associated with traditional interstate relations are becoming ever less relevant because they are no longer a source of serious tensions. This means that the United States can—and, given the nature of contemporary and future problems, should—focus its attention away from the interstate strategic environment as such and towards transnational issues.

Furthermore, this school argues not only that interstate conflict and competition are fading but also that sustained and substantial international cooperation and even integration is possible. In other words, not only has the possibility of major interstate war declined, but states are increasingly able to cooperate towards common goals in meaningful ways, primarily through institutions, which offer states reliable methods for sustained cooperation.<sup>73</sup> This opens the possibility of serious cooperation and integration of objectives, efforts, and capabilities in the pursuit of common goals.

### **What does the United States need to do in order to fulfill its objectives and interests? What are the threats to the United States?**

While most advocates of a grand strategy of integration agree that the main threats to the United States are transnational rather than strategic in nature, actual proposals for how to operationalize the strategy vary.

All proponents agree that the United States needs to work more effectively and earnestly with other nations and non-state entities to strengthen international institutions, norms, and mechanisms for addressing transnational threats. To some, this means taking

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<sup>71</sup> For an analysis, see Robert Jervis, *American Foreign Policy in a New Era* (New York: Routledge, 2005), ch. 1.

<sup>72</sup> See, for instance, Richard Haass, “Bringing Our Foreign Policy Home,” *Time*, August 8, 2011.

<sup>73</sup> See, e.g., Robert O. Keohane, *After Hegemony: Cooperation and Discord in the World Political Economy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), and G. John Ikenberry, *After Victory: Institutions, Strategic Restraint, and the Rebuilding of Order After Major Wars* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).

incremental steps within the existing international structure, such as by organizing a concert of democracies and strengthening mechanisms for legitimizing military interventions in the name of collective security other than the United Nations Security Council. It also means emphasizing the importance of integrating new rising powers such as China and India into existing international institutions that reflect American values and interests.<sup>74</sup>

More ambitious proponents of an integration approach argue for a concert of powers across ideological and traditional interest-based lines directed towards addressing the key transnational challenges of the day. Thus, the United States would actively mesh its capabilities and decision-making processes with those of other powers to tackle problems of proliferation, pandemic disease, migration, and the like.<sup>75</sup> Finally, the strongest advocates of an integration approach call for the commitment of the United States to a collective security arrangement whereby U.S. decision-making would be generally subsumed into the collective decision-making body of an international mechanism for ascertaining blame in a situation of conflict. U.S. capabilities would be subordinated to the international collective for enforcement of the organization's determination.<sup>76</sup>

## **What are the military implications of this strategy?**

The main military implication of the strategy is the transition from the U.S. military as an instrument of more narrow U.S. interest, to a participant in a broader collective that could range from like-minded concerts of democracies (in the more modest view) to regional or global collective security arrangements (in some of the more ambitious

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<sup>74</sup> See, for instance, Princeton Project on National Security, *Forging a World of Liberty Under Law*. The school of thought represented in the Princeton Project's work, as well as that of its members, tends to reflect elements of several schools, primarily the hegemonic, selective engagement, and integrationist schools. Proponents of this approach often present this syncretistic approach as a virtue, claiming that they draw from all schools for a more policy-practical and intellectually incisive result. For a critical analysis of this dimension, see Richard Betts, "Institutional Imperialism," *The National Interest*, April 2011.

<sup>75</sup> See, for instance, Van Evera, "A Farewell to Geopolitics," and Muller, "Framework Conditions." For a more cautious approach along similar lines, see Nina Hachigian and Mona Sutphen, *The Next American Century: How the U.S. Can Thrive As Other Powers Rise* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2008).

<sup>76</sup> Outright proposals for a classic collective security arrangement are, however, relatively rare in today's debate. For an argument for its use in Europe, see Charles Kupchan and Clifford Kupchan, "Concerts, Collective Security, and the Future of Europe."



variants). Because advocates generally perceive the strategic threat environment as rather benevolent, military requirements might decrease in this strategy. Conversely, however, because U.S. responsibilities would rise progressively under increasingly ambitious collective security commitments, so U.S. military requirements would also rise.<sup>77</sup> One method for addressing this problem proposed by some integration advocates entails the inclusion of intrusive and comprehensive arms control strictures to minimize the incentives and temptations to war while reducing the military burden on member-state economies.<sup>78</sup>

## **Why is this strategy claimed to be superior to the alternatives?**

Proponents argue that grand strategies of integration are superior because they are better adapted to the international political and security environment that the United States actually faces. No longer is the world full of anxious, security-focused states constantly on the verge of war, advocates argue; rather, the likelihood and salience of major war are declining and transnational problems are increasingly central. Classical grand strategies of power balancing are, to this line of argument, anachronistic and quite possibly dangerous. Pursuit of hegemony is dangerous because it is alienating, wasteful, and futile, whereas strategies of restraint are dangerous because they leave unaddressed through effective U.S. action the “real” problems of today that are inherently global in scope. Moreover, proponents often argue that strategies of power politics are inherently less moral than integration approaches.

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<sup>77</sup> For an analysis of the force structure implications, see Posen and Ross, “Competing Visions for U.S. Grand Strategy,” 29-30.

<sup>78</sup> See, for instance, William J. Perry and Ashton B. Carter, *Preventive Defense: A New Security Strategy for America* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1999), and Janne E. Nolan, ed., *Global Engagement: Cooperation and Security in the 21st Century* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1994). Nolan provides a succinct definition of this principle: “Cooperative engagement is a strategic principle that seeks to accomplish its purposes through institutionalized consent rather than through threats of material or physical coercion. It presupposes fundamentally compatible security objectives and seeks to establish collaborative rather than confrontational relationships among national military establishments. The basis for such collaboration is mutual acceptance of and support for the defense of home territory as the exclusive national military objective and the subordination of power projection to the constraints of international consensus.” (See pages 4-5.)

## What are the critiques of this strategy?

Critiques of strategies of integration center around such strategies' alleged lack of realism and propensity to involve the United States in conflicts unrelated to important national interests. Fundamentally, critiques of strategies of integration argue that major war remains possible in the contemporary world.<sup>79</sup> Thinking strategically about the national interest therefore remains vital.

In light of this, one strand of this critique emphasizes that collective arrangements for security—to the extent that they go beyond alliances driven by traditional conceptions of threat and advantage—ask of nations more than they can be expected or, in the event, will be prepared to give if the system is put to the test. Collective security arrangements are therefore not reliable against classic strategic threats, because states cannot safely rely on such mechanisms for their security, as evidenced in the failures of the League of Nations and UN Security Council to punish aggression.<sup>80</sup> Moreover, because collective security arrangements rely on automatic and general enforcement of the rules of the collective system, to the extent that the regime does function (which critics argue, will invariably be partial), it will be likely to embroil the United States in wars peripheral to its interests and generally diminish international security by preventing the application of pragmatic solutions to disputes.<sup>81</sup>

## What are the implications of this strategy for the U.S. Navy?

This strategic approach downplays the probability of serious conflict among major powers and emphasizes the need to build and support order throughout the world, including in

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<sup>79</sup> For arguments about the continuing plausibility of war, see Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations*, and “No Exit: The Errors of Endism,” *The National Interest*, Fall 1989; Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: Free Press, 1992), esp. ch. 31; Andrew F. Krepinevich, *7 Deadly Scenarios: A Military Futurist Explores War in the 21st Century* (New York: Bantam, 2009). See also Elbridge A. Colby, “Why Nuclear Deterrence is Still Relevant,” in Adam Lowther, ed., *Deterrence in the 21st Century: Enduring Questions in a Time of Rising Powers, Rogue Regimes, and Terrorism* (forthcoming).

<sup>80</sup> See, for a classic critique along these lines, Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations*, 397-403. For a critique of post-Cold War proposals for collective security, see Richard K. Betts, “Systems for Peace or Causes of War? Collective Security, Arms Control, and the New Europe,” *International Security* 17, no. 1, Summer 1992: 5-43. For a more recent critique, see Art, *A Grand Strategy for America*, 92-94.

<sup>81</sup> Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations*, 401.

troubled and developing regions. Therefore, requirements for the U.S. Navy would be likely to shift away from sea control and strategic deterrence towards enabling power projection, forward presence, and policing missions. Smaller and lower-end naval vessels would therefore probably receive priority over larger and higher-end platforms. Moreover, ground and supporting naval air forces would generally be given precedence over air forces dedicated to strategic missions, given the former's greater relevance to stabilization missions. Intrusive and comprehensive arms control, including naval arms control, would also be a central part of this strategy.<sup>82</sup> It would also place forward deployment in pursuit of cooperative security and confidence-building at the center of naval operations, putting far less focus on objectives such as sea control.

## Dark horse candidates: Isolationism and world government

Some participants in the debate propose a policy of outright isolationism, which may be defined as the proposition that going abroad to ensure American security is almost always unnecessary and that doing so regularly undermines it.<sup>83</sup> It is unnecessary, advocates argue, because U.S. interests beyond the ability to conduct commerce in other regions are limited and, to the extent that such interests do exist there, balances of power will generally function effectively to prevent the agglomeration of power by a hostile state. Even if a hostile state were to arise, moreover, isolationism advocates place great weight on the effectiveness of nuclear deterrence in minimizing the consequences of war, specifically by preventing the conquest of nuclear-possessing states. This severely limits the deleterious impact of any such wars on the United States.<sup>84</sup> Conversely, American intervention abroad is a decided net negative for U.S. interests, advocates contend, as it

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<sup>82</sup> For earlier analyses of naval arms control, see Andreas Furst et al., *Europe and Naval Arms Control in the Gorbachev Era* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).

<sup>83</sup> Eric Nordlinger, *Isolationism Reconfigured: American Foreign Policy for a New Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 6. See also, e.g., Eugene Gholz, Daryl G. Press, and Harvey M. Sapolsky, "Come Home America: The Strategy of Restraint in the Face of Temptation," *International Security* 21, no. 4, Spring 1997, 5-48; Christopher Preble, *The Power Problem: How American Military Dominance Makes Us Less Safe, Less Prosperous, and Less Free* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009), and the works of other scholars at the Cato Institute.

<sup>84</sup> See, e.g., Gholz et al., "Come Home America," 13-14, 46-47.

generates terrorism, encourages the United States to become embroiled in foreign wars, and costs the American taxpayer an inordinate sum.<sup>85</sup>

Isolationism advocates share many of the analytical assumptions and assessments of offshore balancers, but are more sanguine both about the likelihood of a serious Eurasian hegemon arising and about the dangers that such a power would pose to the United States. Isolationism proponents tend to discount the severity of alleged threats to U.S. security and argue that the international security environment without vigorous U.S. leadership and strength would be much the same, if not more stable and secure.

For the Navy, a U.S. grand strategy of isolationism would mean a much greater share of the military budget, but that budget would be considerably smaller and the Navy's role would be limited to defense of the United States and perhaps some limited expeditionary operations.<sup>86</sup>

Despite the term's frequent use in political debate, actual policy-relevant isolationists are rare, especially outside the academy.<sup>87</sup> In actuality, the term "isolationism" is mostly used in debate on national strategy as a term of opprobrium and something of a tar brush. Under current or plausible political and strategic conditions, the chances of an isolationist grand strategy being adopted, whether rhetorically or in actuality, are extremely remote.

An even less influential but likewise logically coherent policy position is world government. While world federalist movements gained some traction in the wake of the Second World War, they quickly lost influence and did not recover as a serious option within the United States even after the end of the Cold War. Like "isolationism," "world government" is more often used as a brush to tar opponents; unlike "isolationism," however, "world government" does not appear to have any substantial following in the U.S. debate on grand strategy.

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<sup>85</sup> See, e.g., Christopher Preble, "The U.S. Needs a New Grand Strategy of Restraint," *Armed Forces Journal*, May 2009: 21-22, 44; and Benjamin H. Friedman and Christopher Preble, "Budgetary Savings from Military Restraint," Cato Policy Analysis No. 667 (September 23, 2010).

<sup>86</sup> See, for instance, Friedman and Preble, "Budgetary Savings," 8-9.

<sup>87</sup> An exception would be the Cato Institute in Washington, D.C., which includes a number of articulate isolationists.



# Conclusions

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## Utility of strategy and strategic debate

It is an open question whether the United States is capable of pursuing a coherent grand strategy. The structure of American government and the nature of American political debate make sustained pursuit of a defined, concrete strategy difficult, if not impossible.

But debates about the proper American grand strategy have utility even if none of the contending strategies can be wholly adopted, for U.S. governments have and will continue to pursue policies primarily motivated by a given approach to protecting and advancing American interests in the international strategic environment. The Bush Administration, for instance, announced its commitment to such a strategic approach in its 2002 *National Security Strategy*, while the Nixon Administration did the same in its annual *Foreign Policy Reports of the President*. No administration is capable of fully implementing its proposed strategy, but such strategies can and often do provide a structure that drives much of an administration's policymaking. In this light, debates about the proper grand strategy for the country are immensely important in clarifying the merits and demerits, the risks and rewards, and the assumptions and aspirations of given strategies.

While it is not the prerogative of the Navy to elect the Nation's grand strategy, it should be prepared to provide recommendations to policy-makers about the feasibility and advisability of strategies in light of their implications for the naval services. This can only be done by understanding the conceptual landscape, and by drawing the appropriate inferences from it with respect to their impact on the Navy and its mission.

## Role of the Navy

Each of the four main proposed grand strategies calls upon the Navy in different ways. In thinking through the implications of each, Navy leaders should ask two main sets of questions.

- First, is major war essentially a thing of the past, at least for as long as we can envision? This is not the same thing as asking whether war is likely, for effective deterrence and its substantial requirements can make war very unlikely even as it

remains eminently possible. Rather, is major war obsolete, whether because of weapons, the interconnectedness of the modern global economy, or advancing politico-moral consciousness? If this is the case, then the **grand strategy of integration** offers much, while the other three options focus too much on archaic concerns, a focus that may undermine stability.

- Second, if a major war remains possible, what is the best way to sustain a peaceful international environment conducive to American interests? Is the international environment highly anarchic and likely to fall apart into chaos without expansive U.S. involvement, thus calling forth an ambitious strategy of **hegemony**? From this perspective, the exertions required to sustain hegemony are worth the cost because they are less than what the United States would suffer in more restrained strategies. For **selective engagement** and **offshore balancing**, however, a strategy of hegemony is both unnecessary and harmful, likely to undermine American strength and long-term commitment to upholding stability by embroiling it in unnecessary conflicts. **Selective engagement** straddles the difference between strategies of hegemony and offshore balancing, pointing to the dangerous anarchy possible and perhaps likely following American withdrawal to an offshore balancing position but calling for a more disciplined focus on those regions and problems that most affect core U.S. interests. **Offshore balancing** focuses on husbanding American power, assessing that threats can be countered once they arise.

There is no “right” answer to these debates, which turn on assessments of human behavior that are inherently unpredictable. Nonetheless, each involves tradeoffs and assessments of future opportunities and risks that the American people and their leaders should understand. The Navy’s leadership can make a substantial contribution to the formulation and pursuit of an effective, prudent, sensible, and sustainable strategic approach by making clear to policy-makers the concrete implications of each strategy for the Navy and its heavy responsibilities to defend the Nation and advance its interests.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> For a comprehensive discussion of how the Navy can draft its own strategic documents, see Peter Swartz, *U.S. Navy Capstone Strategy, Policy, Vision and Concept Documents: What to Consider Before You Write One*, CNA Quick-Response Report D0020071.A1/Final, March 2009. For additional analysis relevant to the Navy, see Daniel J. Whiteneck et al., *The Navy at a Tipping Point: Maritime Dominance at Stake*. CNA Annotated Briefing D0022262.A3 1 Rev, March 2010, and Michael S. Gerson and Daniel J. Whiteneck, *Deterrence and Influence: The Navy’s Role in Preventing War*, CNA Research Memorandum D0019315.A4 1 Rev, March 2009.





